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ABSTRACT

There is a growing movement within the field of "rhetoric and composition" to separate the more theoretical, abstract, and prestigious rhetoric from the more practical composition. Evidence cannot irrefutably prove that professionalization is creating an opposition between the two elements of the discipline with a privileging of rhetoric, but there is no doubt that the discipline has increasingly privileged theory over practice. A short list of observations suggests what effect this privileging has been having on women in the field: (1) the ratio between men and women in scholarly journal publications does not reflect that of the profession in general; (2) Theresa Enos has found that more men publish in scholarly and theoretical journals, more women in journals concerned with the practical issues of teaching; (3) men hold twice as many tenure-track positions, despite the fact that over half the doctorates earned are by women; and (4) in response to a call to the "unheard voices" in the field, 47 responded versus 21 men. (TB)

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ED 384 892

Alice Calderonello

Rhetoric/Composition: Separate But Not Equal

I have been asked to talk briefly about what affect--if any--the separation of *rhetoric* from *composition* has had or will have on women within the profession. To concretize this issue for those who haven't thought about it or encountered it, I'd like to relate an incident that happened at Bowling Green.

Several years ago, a new assistant professor with a Ph.D. in rhetoric from a prestigious program joined our faculty. We were delighted to have him because he was bright, energetic, and brimming with ideas; however, some of the ideas he expressed were controversial. He wanted us, for example, to remove the word "composition" from the title of our doctoral program, claiming that many serious students wouldn't apply for the program if we left it in. [At the time, we offered a Ph.D. in English with an emphasis in *Rhetoric and Composition.*; now we offer a Ph.D. in English with an emphasis in *Rhetoric and Writing.*] In his estimation, the word *composition* referred to the narrow practice of teaching freshman composition, a practice he did not consider well-grounded in either theory or research. He also lobbied (unsuccessfully) to omit our graduate level course in the teaching of writing from our core of required courses.

Although I do not wish to imply that the attitude towards the words *rhetoric* and *composition* as depicted in the above anecdote is typical or even pervasive among members of our profession, I don't believe that it is rare, either. In fact, that I think that the process of professionalization, which our discipline has been undergoing for the past several decades, has been accelerating the process of separating the two words and of privileging *rhetoric* over *composition*. In my estimation, *rhetoric* has become

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increasingly associated with *theory,; composition* with *practice* and *practitioners*. [I make this claim with a sense of irony. Apparently, according to Edward P.J. Corbett, composition and rhetoric were linked at the 1963 CCCC's in Los Angeles because of papers read by Wayne Booth (rhetorical stance) and Francis Christensen (rhetoric of the sentence). And here's what Virginia Burke had to say about that in "The Composition-Rhetoric Pyramid" published in CCC in Feb. 1965:

> [r]hetoric is a magic word these days....Ten years ago the term would have been considered quaint, pretentious, unseemly, or meaningless to many who conjure with it now. Ten years ago the term would have had no sales value. Today it has. There's a disturbing touch of huckterism abroad as the bandwagon swings into University Avenue and everyone climbs aboard for a sing-along-with Rhetoric." Burns Phillips, Donna, Ruth Greenberg, and Sharon Gibson. "*College omposition and Communication*: Chronicling a Discipline's Genesis." CCC 44 (Dec. 1993): 443-464.]

Now, I may not be able to provide you with irrefutable evidence to support my claim that professionalization is creating an opposition between rhetoric and composition with the privileging of rhetoric, but do I believe that the trend within our discipline *has* been to increasingly privilege theory over practice, and I am not alone in my observation. In 1987, Stephen North in The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field (1987) remarked that what marked Composition's "emergence as a nascent academic field more than anything else [was] the need to replace practice as the field's dominant mode of inquiry. (p. 15)" He further predicted that professionals within our discipline would "try to increase their distance from practice" (p. 367) and characterized "practicality" as a "liability...for

Composition Scholars trying to survive in the context of literary studies. " (p. 368) Jane Peterson, in her Chair's Address at the 1990 4C's Convention, lamented that as a profession we "consider teaching far less important than research or scholarship" (CCC, February 1991, p. 27) These and other similar perceptions are supported by Thomas Huckin's 1988 study in which he examined paper topics and proposals for 4C's. His findings suggest that in 1988 theoretical proposals were more likely to be selected to appear on the conference program than those that emphasized pedagogy and that this "bias...observed...against pedagogy-oriented proposals...was not a one-time aberration but [was] part of a general trend." (p. 12)

If, as a result of professionalization, the rift between theory and practice--between *rhetoric* and *composition* --is growing, with rhetoric being valued (and composition, concomitantly devalued) are there consequences for women within the profession? I would answer an emphatic yes and conclude with the following short list of items--you may also be able to think of others:

1. The ratio of male to female publication within scholarly journals does not reflect the overall ratio of men to women within the profession (Enos, 1988; Holbrook, 1991); on this basis Sue Ellen Holbrook and others characterize men as the "makers of knowledge" within our discipline.

2. After examining the publications (book reviews excluded) within our professional journals from 1982-87 Theresa Enos found "an inverse relationship between male and female publication in what [are] consider[ed] scholarly journals and those...consider[ed] pedagogical." ("Gender and Journals, Conservers or Innovators," Pretext (9. Fall/Winter 1988, 209-214)

3. Although "over half the doctorates in English and American literature are now earned by women, men hold twice as many tenure track

positions....(Huber, 59, 61) Approximately twenty percent of women with a Ph.D. hold a non-tenure track positions in teaching while only seven percent of men do (Huber, 65)" This from Betina Huber's study, "Women in the Modern Languages, 1970-90." Profession 90 (1990):58-78 as quoted in "Hearing Voices in English Studies," Margaret Baker Graham and Patricia Goubil-Gambrell (JAC, Winter 1995) [Sue Ellen Holbrook's study (published in 1991) also suggests that women hold a preponderance of non-tenured positions within our profession].

4. In response to Sheryl Fontaine and Susan Hunter's recent call "for unheard voices" women answered in far greater numbers than men (47 women submitted proposals as opposed to 21 men.) One of the papers published in their resulting collection, Writing Ourselves Into the Story: Unheard Voices from Composition Studies (SIU Press, 1993) begins like this: "I am a classic representative of the unheard voices of our discipline. I am female, part-time, and of course untenured....The depth of my longing to become part of the conversation is apparent in my reaction to receiving Sheryl Fontaine and Susan Hunter's prospectus for this book....As I read the editors' invitation to submit a proposal...and saw that the topic...addressed my concerns, I started to cry." (p. 60)

5 (and last). In 1990 Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg published a volume called the Rhetorical Tradition. Of the forty-two persons included in the work, thirty-four are male; six are female; two are anonymous. Gertrude Buck is not included. Within the section entitled "Twentieth-Century Rhetoric" the works of only two women--Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva--appear.